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ABSTRACT

A 1973 study by Lott posed some serious questions about attitudes toward children, the quality of childhood experiences with parents, and the extent of agreement with the women's liberation movement. A replication and extension of Lott's research was conducted to assess the current attitudes of 76 college students and 63 community residents toward child-rearing, recalled childhood experiences, views of women's liberation, and personality characteristics. Some of the results replicated earlier findings, including that individuals with highly positive attitudes toward child-rearing considered it a more creative and socially valuable activity, and anti-liberation women expressed greater personal interest in child-rearing than pro-liberation women. The failure to replicate other results suggests that attitudes have changed, with views of the sexes converging in some instances and some women's liberation tenets gaining broader acceptance. Although analysis of personality differences between pro- and anti-liberation subjects reveals some differences, implications for suitability for parenthood are unclear. (Author/NRB)

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Relationships Among Attitudes Toward Children,
Women's Liberation, and Personality Characteristics

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Relationships Among Attitudes Toward Children, Women's Liberation, and Personality Characteristics

A replication and extension of a 1973 study "Who Wants the Children?" was undertaken. Attitudes toward child-rearing, one's own remembered childhood experiences, views of women's liberation, and personality characteristics were assessed for 76 college students and 63 community residents. Some of the earlier findings were replicated: individuals with highly positive attitudes toward child-rearing considered it a more creative and socially valuable activity and anti-liberation women expressed greater personal interest in child-rearing than pro-liberation women. The failure to replicate other results suggests that attitudes have changed, with views of the sexes converging and some women's liberation tenets gaining broader acceptance. Analysis of personality differences between pro- and anti-liberation subjects revealed some differences, but it was noted that implications for suitability for parenthood are unclear.

In 1973 Lott published "Who Wants the Children?", a study which posed some serious questions about attitudes toward children, parents, and women's liberation. The relationships between attitudes toward children and two other variables were examined: the quality of childhood experiences with parents and the extent of agreement with the women's liberation movement.

The present study attempts to replicate Lott's findings and to explore some other variables that might further explain her results. The specific purposes are: 1) to attempt a replication of Lott's findings relevant to relationships among attitudes toward having children, the quality of one's remembered childhood experiences, and attitudes toward women's liberation; 2) to explore the possibility of a change in the relationship between attitudes toward having children and toward women's liberation since 1973; 3) to assess the importance of some other variables in the decision to have or not have children, namely, attitudes regarding the seriousness of the population crisis, the importance of having adequate financial resources, and the desirability of egalitarian parenting; and 4) to explore personality differences between pro- and anti-liberation women.

Method

Subjects

The sample for Lott's study comprised college students. This study sought

to extend the generalizability of results and thus also employed a community sample randomly selected from the telephone directory. Subjects thus included 76 college students and 63 community residents. However, no attempt was made to match these samples and they differed with respect to age and marital status.

Measures

Much of the questionnaire employed by Lott (1973) was used to allow reliable comparison of results. Measures of the judged value of child-rearing to society, the individual's perception of creativity required for child-rearing, and the subject's personal interest in pursuing child-rearing were obtained by a ranking procedure. Attitudes toward women's liberation were obtained employing the 42-item scale Lott devised (modified and adapted from Kirkpatrick; cf. Shaw & Wright, 1967). The four Likert-type questions Lott used to assess attitudes toward having children, parents, and women's liberation were included, and the researchers devised three similar questions tapping attitudes about considering the population crisis before deciding to have children, the importance of having adequate finances before deciding to have children, and the desirability of a commitment to egalitarian parenting. To assess personality characteristics six scales from the 16PF (Institute for Personality and Ability Testing, 1972) were included: E (Humble versus Asservice); H (Shy versus Venturesome); I (Tough-minded versus Tender-minded); Q (Conservative versus Experimenting); Q₂ (Group-dependent versus Self-sufficient); and Q₃ (Undisciplined self-conflict versus Controlled).

Results

As in the Lott study, subjects who were highly positive in their child-rearing attitude perceived child care as requiring more creativity than those with low or moderate inclination ($F(1,85)=4.28, p < .05$). The sex difference that Lott reported on this variable was not found in this study.

The present researchers also found, as did Lott, that subjects who ranked child-rearing as having greater social value tended to have a positive attitude toward having and raising children ($F(1,85)=11.28$, $p < .001$). The community sample also ranked child-rearing of greater social value than the students ($F(1,85)=10.48$, $p < .04$).

Lott's finding that child-oriented subjects tended to remember their parents as being more nurturant than less child-oriented subjects was not replicated.

The sex difference Lott observed with respect to attitude toward women's liberation was not substantiated in this study.

Differences were noted for the variables added by the present researchers. People with low to moderate attitudes toward child-rearing ranked the population crisis higher than positively oriented subjects ($F(1,85)=5.60$, $p < .02$). Although both attitudinal groups thought adequate finances were essential before having children, students ranked this item of even more importance than the community residents ($F(1,85)=8.12$, $p < .006$). Students also demanded more of a commitment from their spouse for equal participation in child-rearing before deciding to have children ($F(1,85)=4.43$, $p < .04$).

Lott found that pro-liberation women ranked child-rearing as requiring more creativity and were less interested in rearing children than anti-liberation women. Interestingly, pro- and anti-liberation women did not differ on the creativity variable in this study.

Both pro-liberation men ($F(1,34)=11.53$, $p < .002$) and women ($F(1,44)=13.71$, $p < .001$) were more likely than anti-liberation subjects to consider the population crisis before having children. Pro-liberation women thought it more important than anti-liberation women to have adequate finances ($F(1,44)=4.61$, $p < .04$) and a commitment from one's spouse for equal participation in child-rearing ($F(1,44)=5.36$, $p < .02$).

For the personality variables, both male ($F(1,17)=6.19, p < .02$) and female ($F(1,46)=6.22, p < .02$) liberationists attained higher scores on the Humble-Assertive variable, which implies they are more assertive, self-assured, competitive, stubborn, and independent-minded. Similarly, both males ($F(1,37)=5.06, p < .03$) and females ($F(1,46)=16.35, p < .001$) sympathetic to the women's liberation movement scored higher on the Conservative-Experimenting variable, indicating they are critical, liberal, analytic, and free-thinking.

Conclusions

As has been seen, some of Lott's findings were replicated. But even more noteworthy are the divergences from her results. Lott had speculated that some liberation ideology simply reflected the existing cultural denigration of child-related activities. If this was indeed the case, our data suggest that the women's liberation movement has adopted a different position and, furthermore, this view has gained some broad acceptance. For instance, in this study neither men (compared to women) nor anti-liberation women (compared to pro-liberation women) rated child-rearing as lacking in creativity, as they had in the original study. The data also points to an intersex convergence of attitude, with men's and women's attitudes toward liberation and child-rearing being less disparate now than during the period of Lott's study.

Although Lott had speculated about the suitability of the anti-liberation women to parent, it is felt that further inquiry into personality correlates of liberation views is necessary, as well as investigation of variables related to suitability to parent.

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